

# EDF NEWS RELEASE

## ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### MEMBERS OF CONGRESS URGE INDIAN LAND PROTECTION IN BRAZILIAN AMAZON

(7 October, 1996 -- Washington, DC) The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) supported the action taken by seventeen members of the US House of Representatives, led by Tom Lantos (D-CA) and John Porter (R-IL), in a letter sent to Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso urging rapid action to protect the land of the Macuxi Indians in the Raposa/Serra do Sol area of Roraima state in the northern Brazilian Amazon. The representatives expressed concern that Brazil's Minister of Justice Nelson Jobim may turn much of the area over to ranchers and gold miners in response to pressure from Amazon politicians, precipitating violence in the region and setting a disastrous precedent for other Indian lands. The Minister is scheduled to make a decision by October 10th on whether to protect this key area. In separate correspondence, Representatives Porter and Lantos urged the State Department to raise the issue with Brazil's government.

INSTITUTO SOCIOAMBIENTAL  
data 04/10/98  
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"The letter shows that US policy makers understand the importance of the decision Minister Jobim is about to take," said EDF anthropologist Stephan Schwartzman. "The fate of another 177 Indian areas is hanging in the balance, and there is real potential for explosive conflict in Raposa/Serra do Sol. This decision will be the bellwether of the current government's indigenous policy."

The letter followed a September 26th briefing by Macuxi leader Jose Adalberto Silva, vice-coordinator of the Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR), representing most of the 12,000 Macuxi, Wapixana, Taurepang, and Ingariko Indians of the Raposa/Serra do Sol area. Adalberto detailed how successive local governments have promoted illegal invasion and appropriation of Indian land in the region by cattle ranchers and gold and diamond miners. Twelve Macuxi have been killed in the last nine years in land conflicts, but no one has been held judicially accountable. The state government has frequently used military police to repress Indian efforts to resist the invasions. Death threats, intimidation, and destruction of indigenous property are commonplace.

The CIR vice-coordinator called on the government to honor the commitment in the 1988 Constitution to demarcate (or legally protect) Indian lands in Brazil, and denounced the government's new regulations for Indian land demarcation, Decree 1775, as a delaying tactic that has provoked new invasions and heightened tension in the area. Adalberto further promised that if Minister Jobim does not sign the demarcation order, the Indians will carry out the demarcation themselves. "The government has the money to pay for an Amazon Week festival in New York," said Adalberto. "We have the courage to demarcate our own land if the government won't."

The Environmental Defense Fund, a leading, national, NY-based nonprofit organization, represents 300,000 members. EDF links science, economics, and law to create innovative, economically viable solutions to today's environmental problems.

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 1996

Ilmo. Sr. Fernando Henrique Cardoso  
Presidente da Republica  
Palacio do Planalto  
Brasilia DF 70160-900  
By Fax 01155-61-2267566

Dear President Cardoso:

We write you at this time to express our concern over the fate of the Macuxi, Wapixana, Ingariko and Taurepang indigenous lands in Raposa-Serra do Sol. We are encouraged by your expressed interest in the rights of the indigenous peoples of Brazil. We congratulate you on your recent statement of your commitment to work toward the end of impunity and in favor of human rights.

By October 10, Brazil's Minister of Justice will make a critical decision on the demarcation of the Raposa-Serra do Sol indigenous territory. We understand that he is considering a substantial reduction of this territory. We are concerned that a reduction of this area will set a precedent for the possible reduction of 177 other indigenous areas in Brazil, covering 16.5 million hectares of rainforest. Furthermore, we understand that if the Minister reduces Raposa-Serra do Sol it will not be according to the technical criteria of Decree 1775. The report for Raposa-Serra do Sol -- on which the demarcation is based -- was approved by the Brazilian attorney general, and FUNAI recommended the full demarcation of the territory based on its criteria. We are concerned that if political interests take precedence over the law, it may mean the beginning of the process of reducing indigenous lands in Brazil. If Minister Jobim reduces Raposa-Serra do Sol, there are reliable indications that severe violence in the area will follow. We urge you not to allow the reduction of the Raposa-Serra do Sol indigenous territory.

We are also concerned about the election scheduled for October 3rd that will decide whether to create a county seat in the indigenous area. Article 231 of the Brazilian constitution outlines the inalienability of indigenous lands; we understand that it would therefore be unconstitutional to house a county seat (municipality) within indigenous territory. The creation of a new county seat, however, would lend the appearance of legitimacy to claims against the demarcation of the area. Please do not allow this election to influence any decisions regarding the demarcation of this land.

Indigenous lands in Raposa-Serra do Sol, Brazil

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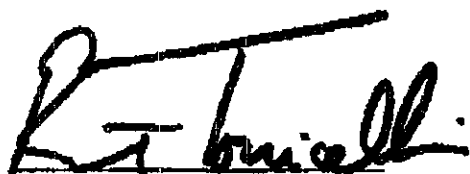
For over 20 years, the Macuxi, Wapixana, Ingariko and Taurepang indigenous peoples of the Raposa-Serra do Sol area of Brazil have been struggling to resist appropriation of their land by cattle ranchers and gold and diamond miners. In addition to invading their land, the ranchers introduced alcohol and forced labor. Any attempts by the indigenous population to combat these problems have been met with threats, intimidation, and violence.

Please do not allow this to continue. Again, we respectfully urge you to assure the demarcation of the entire Raposa-Serra do Sol territory and look forward to your response.

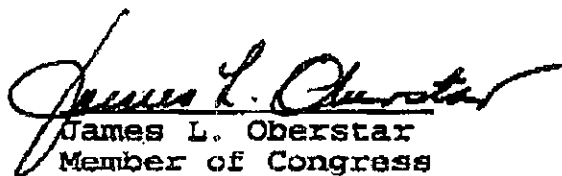
Sincerely,



Tom Lantos  
Member of Congress



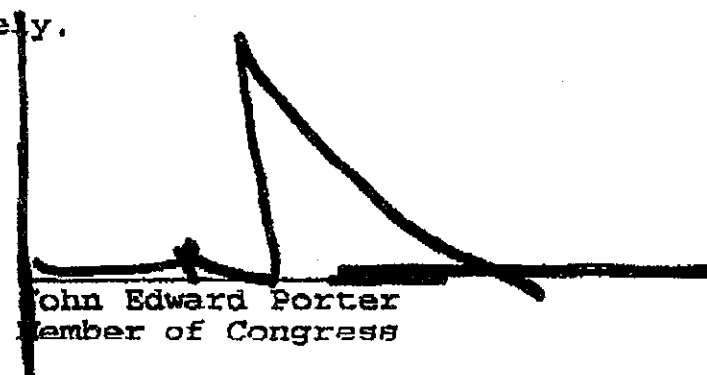
Robert Torricelli  
Member of Congress



James L. Oberstar  
Member of Congress



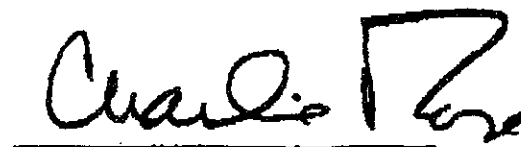
Edolphus Towns  
Member of Congress




John Edward Porter  
Member of Congress



Lynn C. Woolsey  
Member of Congress




Charlie Rose  
Member of Congress

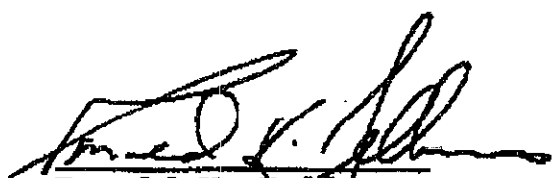


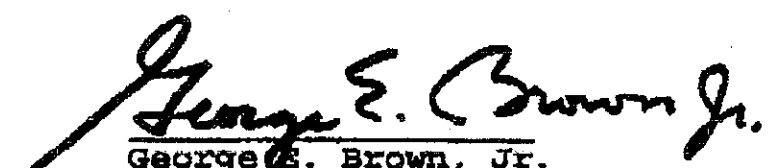
Lucille Roybal-Allard  
Member of Congress


Indigenous lands in Raposa-Serra do Sol, Brazil


  
John W. Olver  
Member of Congress


  
Sheila Jackson-Lee  
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Ronald V. Dellums  
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George E. Brown, Jr.  
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Peter A. DeFazio  
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Patricia Schroeder  
Member of Congress

  
Constance A. Morella  
Member of Congress

  
David R. Obey  
Member of Congress

  
Martin Malin  
Member of Congress

cc: Minister of Justice, Nelson Jobim (By Fax: 011-5561-224-2448)  
President of FUNAI, Julio Geiger (By Fax: 011-5561-226-8782)  
Indigenous Council of Roraima (CIR) (By Fax: 011-5561-225-9401)